

TOWN OF AMHERST
Master Plan Steering Committee

March 29, 2021

APPROVED

In attendance: Dwight Brew, Chris Yates, Tom Quinn, Will Ludt, and Tim Kachmar.
Staff in attendance: Natasha Kypfer – Town Planner, and Nic Strong – Community Development Director

1. Roll Call to Order

Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:31pm., and Natasha Kypfer read the following statement. On behalf of the Master Plan Steering Committee, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor’s Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, as extended by various Executive Orders, this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to this meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor’s Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, I am confirming that we are: Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means:

We are utilizing Zoom for this electronic meeting.

All members of the Board have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through this platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone #312-626-6799 and password 821 7443 9935, or by clicking on the following website address: <https://zoom.us/j/82166807619> that was included in the public notice of this meeting. Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have also been provided on the website of the Planning Board at: www.amherstnh.gov. Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access: If anybody has a problem, please call 603-341-5290.

Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting:

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, the meeting will be adjourned and rescheduled.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote. Let’s start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting, which is required under the Right-to- Know law.

Roll call attendance: Dwight Brew, Chris Yates, Will Ludt, Tom Quinn, and Tim Kachmar – all present and alone.

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2. Presentation by Emerge Community Planning & Strategy followed by Q&A

Dwight Brew explained that at the Master Plan Steering Committee's January meeting, he and Nic Strong, Community Development Director, agreed to identify some firms that could provide the group with assistance on the Master Plan. Due to the cost and the Town's Purchasing Policy, an RFP was required. Three firms responded to the bid. Two of the firms will be interviewed tonight, and the final one will be interviewed tomorrow night.

Neil Desai and Victor Minerva, of Emerge Community Planning & Strategy, joined the Steering Committee.

Neil Desai stated that in the company looks to create a Master Plan that presents key data points and trends, has flexible structure, has phased recommendations, is tailored to the community, and is user-friendly.

Neil Desai explained that Emerge's process for a Master Plan is to discover the town by touring it and reviewing NH's Master Plan requirements, study and analyze the town while producing a preliminary draft of the required vision section, engage and envision with the community, and visualize and plan for the future.

In response to a question from Dwight Brew, Neil Desai stated that he believes Amherst is unique in that it has two areas with different characteristics, one that is more rural in nature and the more industrial 101A corridor.

Dwight Brew noted that there are also residential areas south of the 101A corridor.

In response to a question from Dwight Brew, Neil Desai stated that the company would plan to have two meetings with each work group. Neil Desai stated that he would like to approach these groups with questions and preliminary topics to discuss.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Neil Desai explained that, in reviewing the already completed survey of the Town, he took out some of the identified values of the Town. Neil Desai stated that he would like to use these to do a preliminary draft of the Vision section. By doing this first, it should keep all of the groups aligned to these identified values.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Neil Desai stated that he estimated five working groups based on the themes given to him. Neil Desai also noted that some of these meetings could be done in person. He also recommended a couple of town-wide meetings, one to give a summary of the analyses, and another to show a draft of the Master Plan and receive comments on it.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Neil Desai stated that he would recommend having a website for the public to access that would show outcomes and allow for comments. He would

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also recommend an email address for the public to use. Neil Desai stated that there is the possibility of utilizing an online map so that citizens can mark special places to the Town.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, Victor Minerva stated that the company usually interviews Department Heads in order to determine some of the base community needs.

In response to a question from Nic Strong, Neil Desai stated that the Town having already completed a survey saves on the cost of the project. He explained that he determines the approximate number of hours to be spent in each phase of the project by examining the population of the Town.

In response to a question from Nic Strong, Neil Desai stated that the company was involved in every aspect of the project for the updated Master Plan for Westhaven, NJ. Victor Minerva noted that the company used certain people to write certain chapters for the Westport, CT Master Plan update.

In response to a question from Nic Strong, Neil Desai stated that he checks in with certain communities to determine how successful the Master Plan updates are, but sometimes this cannot be known for 5-10 years.

3. Presentation by Nashua Regional Planning Commission followed by Q&A

Jay Minkarah and Sara Siskavich, of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC), joined the Steering Committee.

Jay Minkarah explained that NRPC is a public entity and one of nine Regional Planning Commissions. This region consists of 13 surrounding communities, including Amherst. He explained that many communities updating their Master Plans like to update them chapter by chapter. NRPC uses a website, focus groups, surveys, and charrettes in order to engage the public in the process.

Sara Siskavich explained that NRPC offers communities optional items such as scenario planning and build out analyses as part of the Master Plan update process. There is also the option to create a story map.

Jay Minkarah stated that he believes success of Master Plan updates comes in the form of seeing key components implemented and ownership taken by the community as a whole.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Jay Minkarah stated that the recommendations made for the Master Plan update come from the Town, not from NRPC. NRPC's job is to overlay what it believes will be the right outcomes that come up through the process.

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Tom Quinn asked if NRPC believes its involvement in the Master Plan process is prejudged by the work done previously for the Town. Jay Minkarah stated that he does not believe this is the case.

In response to a question from Tom Quinn, Jay Minkarah stated that the number of meetings can vary based on the needs of the process. He explained that the charrettes are usually held early on in the process. These are scripted in format in order to bring out any concerns and issues in small groups.

In response to a question from Dwight Brew, Jay Minkarah stated that he has some concerns about process of creating working groups. He is concerned that people sometimes self-select for certain groups and form groups around issues they know and are comfortable with. He explained that there is a danger of the groups then becoming subject to groupthink and not necessarily reflecting the whole community. He would like the whole group to sit together as one at first.

In response to a question from Nic Strong, Jay Minkarah stated that he calculated the approximate number of hours to be spent on each phase of the project based on the amount of previous Master Plan work completed by NRPC.

In response to a question from Nic Strong, Jay Minkarah stated that he does not believe NRPC has ever worked on any Master Plan updates in which the towns wrote chapters themselves.

In response to a question from Nic Strong, Jay Minkarah stated that NRPC bases the success of a Master Plan update on the implementation amount. He noted that, generally, higher engagement from the town leads to higher rates on implementation.

Dwight Brew thanked by Emerge and NRPC for their presentations. He stated that the Steering Committee will hear from one other company tomorrow night and make its decision next Monday.

**Chris Yates moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:35 PM. Tim Kachmar seconded.
Roll call: Chris Yates – aye; Dwight Brew – aye; Tom Quinn – aye; Will Ludt – aye; and Tim Kachmar – aye. Motion carried unanimously.**

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: July 19, 2021